

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS FOR STUDENTS

InnerDrive resources



BLOG 1

BUILDING A GOOD TEAM AROUND YOU



You probably know the saying: *'If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together'*. So what are the benefits of building a good team of people around you? Why is teamwork important? And how exactly does it help?

Author Jim Rohn suggests that you are the average of the 5 people you spend the most time with. If you look at any successful person, in every walk of life, they often have a team around them. One classic example of this is the [team at Microsoft](#). While most people associate Microsoft with just Bill Gates, as he has said many times, he couldn't have created it all by himself.

We reviewed the psychological research on the effect of others on personal performance and found 7 main benefits:

ENHANCES YOUR EFFORT

Legendary American football coach Vince Lombardi once commented that *'confidence is contagious'*. It turns out, the same is true for effort. That was the finding of [a recent journal](#) which found that, if the person next to you is working hard, your work ethic increases. Interestingly, this impact was found to be consistent regardless of whether they were doing

an easier or more difficult task than you, or whether the task was similar to yours or not.

As well as improving work ethic, [another study](#) found that teenagers who had to perform a problem solving task together 'engaged in more exploratory behaviour' and 'learnt faster from positive and negative feedback' than when on their own.

SOCIAL SUPPORT AND ADVICE

[Phil Jackson](#), one of the greatest basketball coaches of all time, once said that *'the strength of the team is the individual. The strength of the individual is the team'*. We think this is definitely true. A team is comprised of individuals. If we help each individual maximise their talents, then the team gets stronger. However, it is the support, advice and guidance of the team that can help the individuals develop their skills.

Having access to a supportive network of individuals who can offer you social support [has been found](#) to act as a stress buffer and improve coping. It has also been found to have a positive impact [on your mood and well-being](#).

[Social support comes in many forms](#); it can be someone giving you advice, some making you feel better about the situation or simply listening to you vent. All three are important. Finding people who can help you satisfy each of those needs is key to building a good team around you.



HELPS TO DEVELOP RESILIENCE

Having people around you and asking them for support and advice has been found to be a key way that [Olympic champions develop their resilience](#). A problem shared really is a problem halved. It is not just Olympic gold-medallists who get this advantage; a growing body of research suggests that social support can be a powerful [predictor of resilience to stress](#) for everyone.

Social support plays a key role in helping [students develop their resilience](#) and self-esteem. All too often, and especially in teenagers, people think that asking for help is a sign of weaknesses. In fact, the opposite is true. [Asking for and actually using feedback](#) is the hallmark of a mature learner.

ENHANCES MOTIVATION

Motivation is known to be enhanced by [a variety of different things](#). These include a sense of purpose, choice, mastery and personal belonging or relatedness to a group. For university students [in a randomised control trial test](#), being part of a peer-network increased participation in physical activity. These networks were more successful than promotional messages in motivating students to participate.

Surround yourself with the right people and you will greatly benefit.

In elite sport, rugby player Jonny Wilkinson talks [in his autobiography](#) about the realisation that if he gave himself to the team, then he would get that support back 15 times more, as each player would support him. This realisation helped propel him to international stardom and ultimately winning the World Cup in 2003.

IMPROVES YOUR SELF-VIEW

[A fascinating study](#) in education found that how teachers spoke to their students impacted how the students then spoke to themselves and on how they viewed

themselves. The authors of this research state that '*positive statements made by teachers were found to be directly related to positive self-talk and to maths and learning self-concepts*'.

How other people talk to us has an impact on us, even at a very young age. Researchers have found that the type of praise that we are given between the ages of 1-3 can predict our mindset up to 5 years later. We talk more about the importance of praise and the different types [here](#).

HELPS DEAL WITH STRESSFUL SITUATIONS BETTER

Having a trusted network of individuals who you can turn to can be an extremely helpful coping mechanism for dealing with life stresses. This is why the NHS [urges people to connect with others](#) in order to improve their well-being. Other techniques to improve well-being include being open to learning, being physically active and giving to others (all of which can be done with other people).

CAN IMPROVE PERFORMANCE

In arguably the first ever study in sport psychology, [researchers found](#) that simply having to perform a task in front of other people made people work harder. Fast forward a hundred years and we see the same benefit in the work-place. [In a study of over 300 people](#), researchers found that having a deep and meaningful relationships with the people you work with can improve your performance. They found that colleagues who had good personal relationships had more trust, support and pride in their work.

That is not to say there are no potential drawbacks: the authors note that it can be draining having to offer social support to others whilst doing your work, but on the whole, the benefits to work performance outweighed the costs.

SLEEP YOUR WAY TO SUCCESS



Looking sleepy and tired in class is quite common in young students, as they are often not getting enough sleep. In fact, most people are lacking sleep and face the consequences throughout their day. Losing focus, declining grades, and a diminished memory are only a few of the costs of lost sleep. Luckily, the solution is simple. All you need to do is learn how to sleep better...

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS OF SLEEP

There has been a lot of research done on the power of sleep. Scientists have found that those who sleep better at night have been found to:

- Have [better concentration](#)
- Have [enhanced memory](#)
- Focus less on [the negative](#)
- Be [more creative](#)
- Have a [better immune system](#)
- Be better decision makers

As a result of combining all of these, students who sleep better have been found to get higher grades when compared

to their sleepy peers. [Research shows](#) a difference of half a grade between students who slept well and those who didn't. Getting the recommended amount of sleep each night can allow students to take full advantage of their school day, as they won't feel tired. This means that they will take in more information and be more attentive in class, ultimately leading to improved academic performance.

HOW MUCH SLEEP IS ENOUGH SLEEP?

Chances are, you're not getting enough sleep. There is no exact answer for how much sleep people need, but experts recommend about 7-9 hours a night on average. The amount of sleep you need depends on your age, with adults and older teenagers needing less than children. [A recent survey](#) found that most of us are getting less than 6 ³/₄ hours of sleep each night. In a lot of the schools that we visit to run our workshops, many students say they are getting less than 6.

So how do you know if you are getting enough sleep? Time to take the pillow test...

The Pillow Test: The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Strokes states that if you fall asleep within 5 minutes of your head hitting the pillow each night, you probably aren't getting enough sleep. Try this tonight and if you notice you're falling asleep too quickly, make it a priority to get more sleep.

[According to the NHS](#), one in 3 people suffer from poor sleep. It may not seem that important to get enough sleep, but if you continue that habit, it will eventually catch up to you. Lack of sleep can lead to students feeling grumpy and not working to their full potential. This may have a detrimental impact on their grades and classroom participation.

SLEEP YOUR WAY TO SUCCESS

If you want to become an expert in sleep, we recommend

Your sleep matters more than you might think - look after it.

the excellent Richard Wiseman book *Night School*, as it really is a superb overview of all things sleep related.

In the meantime, there are many tips and tricks you can find on the internet that claim to help you fall asleep fast, from counting sheep to not eating cheese. However, most of them are [simply myths](#) with no scientific evidence to support them. If you're struggling to get enough sleep every night, here are six scientifically proven ways to help you fall asleep fast:



Have a regular bed time - Getting into a habit of sleeping and waking up at specific times will help keep your body clock consistent. If you wake up early during the week for school or work, try and keep this up on the weekend too. It will help you get into a good routine and you will feel more productive throughout the day.

Get on your bike – Doing [an hour's exercise two hours before bed](#) will help tire you out, increase blood flow in your arteries and raise your body temperature. Exercise has countless health benefits; simply riding your bike or going for a swim can help you take advantage of them.

Turn down the brightness on your phone – It is very common to check our phones whilst we're in bed but it's not good to do so in a dark room. When the lights are off and the curtains are drawn, the sleep hormone, melatonin, is released. However, the bright light from your phone hinders this from happening, making it more difficult for you to sleep.

Eat a small turkey and cheese sandwich – This may sound quite random, however, research suggests that [turkey, cheese and bread](#) make the perfect sleepy sandwich. This is because they all contain Tryptophan, a helpful amino acid that is important to our sleep cycle.

Drink cherry juice – Cherries are a natural source of melatonin; the sleep hormone that kickstarts the sleep process. [Studies found](#) that those who drank a glass of cherry juice an hour before bed fell asleep quicker and for longer.

Take a hot bath – Your body temperature [drops when you sleep](#). You can prompt this sleepy state by taking a warm bath, which will also help relax your muscles.

FINAL THOUGHT

Sleep is one of the most important parts of the day. If we don't get the recommended amount, the effects trickle into our daily activities, leaving us unmotivated and grumpy. In the same way we prioritise eating 3 meals a day, we should prioritise sleep.

Developing a sleep routine, reducing light from our phones, and exercising are just a few ways to help you sleep. Integrating these steps into your life can help you sleep better and improve your day.

BLOG 3

9 WAYS FOR STUDENTS TO OVERCOME FOMO



[The teenage brain](#) works differently to an adult one. Studies have shown that being ostracised from the group will impact on them more. This higher value of peer acceptance has been found to impact their [decision making](#), ability to control their impulses and their mood.

It is therefore no surprise that many teenagers have a Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO). If FOMO is a term unfamiliar to you, it is nicely described [here by Urban Dictionary](#). For an extreme version, [this hilarious video](#) gives a good example of FOMO.

FOMO has some interesting consequences. Trying to do too much at once can result in people doing very little of anything (see our [blog on procrastination](#) for more information). It can also increase stress and anxiety. At a time when teenagers are facing life altering decisions and exams (GCSEs and A-levels), FOMO can be a serious issue.

Many students we speak to during our workshops sadly believe that they can't have good grades, a social life and enough sleep at once and can only choose two.

So how can we help students deal with FOMO? We think the following tips offer a good starting point:

Accept that you can't do it all – You can't be in two places at once. Economists use the phrase '[Opportunity Cost](#)'. For each decision you make, it means there is something else that you can not do. Understanding this will help teenagers.

Ask WIN questions (What's Important Now?)

– This is a good way to help people prioritise. If you can't do everything all at once, it's good to start on the things that are most important to you.

Be where your feet are – Focus on the present moment. This is a challenge for a generation where mobile phones (and therefore instant messaging) has always been part of their lives.

[Research suggests](#) that being on your phone too much can negatively impact your sleep, mood and memory.

Choose experiences over status updates – Do things that matter to you, not just what you can write about online. People often give an overly positive and unrealistic representation of their lives online. Don't try and compete with these shadows – it's impossible to catch them.

Go offline – If you are experiencing an event and already planning on how to work it into a tweet, then there is a chance you are missing out on the moment. Taking yourself offline every now and again is probably quite a healthy

9 Ways to Overcome FOMO
Fear Of Missing Out
by @inner_drive | www.innerdrive.co.uk

- 1 You Can't Do It All**
You can't be in two places at once.
- 2 Be Where Your Feet Are**
Focus on the present moment.
- 3 Choose Experiences Over Status Updates**
Do things that matter to you, not just what you can write about online.
- 4 Do One Thing at a Time**
It's hard to multi-task, so focus on one thing at a time.
- 5 Minimize Distractions**
Sometimes it's good to turn your phone off.
- 6 Ask WIN Questions**
What's Important Now?
- 7 The Grass Isn't Always Greener**
People often seem happier on Facebook than they actually are.
- 8 Limit Time on Social Media**
Excessive use of social media is linked to FOMO.
- 9 Enjoy the Journey**
Embrace the process, as well as the outcome.

strategy, especially as FOMO is [linked to the amount of time spent on social media](#).

Comparing yourself to others will only bring unnecessary harm.

Do one thing at a time – It's hard to multi-task, so fully focus on one thing. Multitasking is a bit of myth. Instead, people often switch between tasks. This can take up time and energy. If accuracy is important (say during revision), better to fully focus on one thing, finish it and then do another.

Enjoy the journey – Embrace the process, as well as the outcome. Outcomes can sometimes be anti-climatic. However, working hard and dedicating yourself to your goals rarely is. Life is short and time is precious. If you only focus on the end product and not the process that got you there, you may miss opportunities to learn, improve and enjoy yourself.

7 WAYS TO GET OUT OF A BAD MOOD



Bobby McFerrin famously sang “*Don’t worry, be happy*”.

But that’s easier said than done, right? Sometimes we find ourselves stuck in a huff and we don’t know why, or maybe we do know why, but we still struggle to break out of it.

Being in a bad mood has a powerful effect; it leads to [social rejection](#), [worse problem-solving skills](#), and an [inability to stop unwanted thoughts](#). So what does psychological research tell us about how to get out of a bad mood? Here are 7 tips:

Go For a Run

Exercise is a great way to lift your spirits; just a 10-minute run [is shown](#) to increase positive feelings and mood. Exercise releases dopamine in your brain acting much in the same way anti-depressants do!

Be Optimistic

Just thinking that positive things will happen to you in the future improves mood. Optimistic people live a higher quality of life than pessimists. In fact, [optimism leads](#) to better emotional flexibility, problem solving, and rationalising despite negative situations.

Positive Imagery

Much like being optimistic, imagining yourself succeeding or being the best you can be helps bring about a good mood.

If you're feeling down, [actively taking time](#) to think or write about your best possible self brings about a positive change in mood. To read more about this, check out our blog about visualization in either [education \(before an exam\)](#) or in [sport \(before a match\)](#).

Take a Deep Breath

Slow deliberate breathing and movement has a [whole host of positive effects](#). This [has been shown](#) to reduce negative feelings such as depression, anger, fatigue, and anxiety.

Take a Nap

Extended periods of being awake or feelings of fatigue and exhaustion will increase negative emotions. To offset that, a single hour-long nap leads to increased feelings of joy and happiness. By both countering situations that lead to negative effects and bringing on positive effects, napping is a powerful tool to snap out of a bad mood.

Treat Yourself

Everyone loves treating themselves to a little bit of "retail therapy", but you can now [justify it with science](#)! The consumption of these self-indulgent treats has a lasting positive effect on mood, beyond their immediate enjoyment. Furthermore, even unplanned "impulse buys" (in moderation) done with the purpose of improving mood do not lead to feelings of guilt or regret later on.

Listen to Music

Music is a powerful tool when



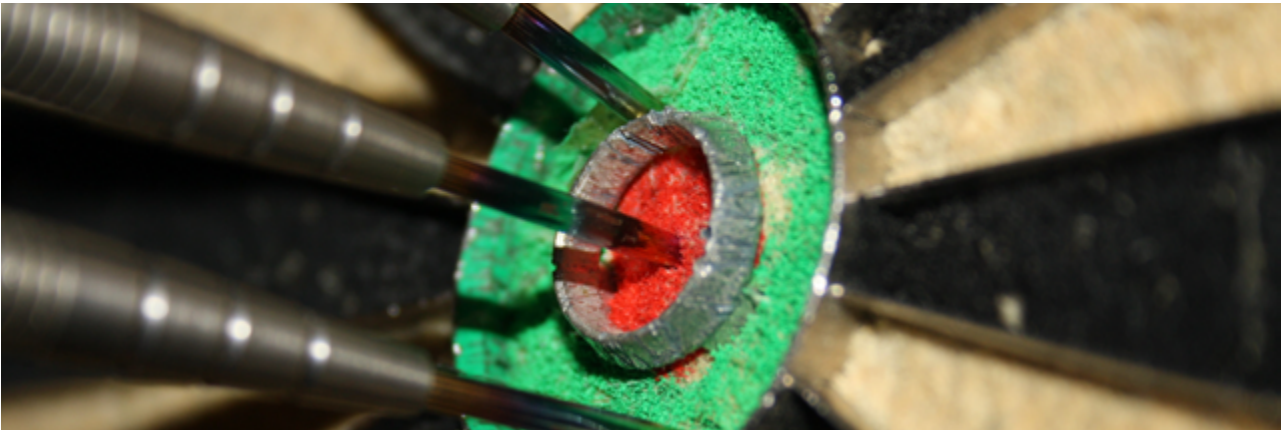
Being in a bad mood only ever gets in your way.

it comes to emotions. Happy music is an effective distraction from bad feelings. [In research](#), people who listened to upbeat, positive music when they were in a poor mood did a better job of repairing their mood and had a more optimistic view of their ability to fix their mood.

For even more tips on using mindset to improve your mood, check out our blog on [7 Ways to be More Optimistic](#).

BLOG 5

5 WAYS TO MANAGE PERFECTIONISM



Teenagers often feel under great pressure to be perfect. Perfectly smart. Perfect looks. Perfect at sport. Perfect at socialising. Unfortunately, for many this leads to an increase in stress and can reduce individual development. So how can we best help students when overcoming perfectionism?

WHAT IS PERFECTIONISM?

[Perfectionism is defined](#) as ‘straining compulsively and unceasingly towards unobtainable goals and measuring their self-worth by productivity and accomplishment’. The problem here is clear. If you set unobtainable goals and measure your self-worth against those goals, you are likely to be continuously disappointed, angry and stressed when you inevitably fail.

Though both male and female students can suffer from perfectionism, it seems that it may be [more common in female students](#). A recent survey carried out by the Department for Education found that a third of teenage girls report [issues around anxiety and depression](#).

Anecdotally, from our experience of running workshops for over 30,000 students a year in over 140 schools, many

teachers are reporting higher levels of stress, anxiety and perfectionist traits in students (especially high achieving female students).

As well as hurting general well-being, perfectionism can lead to a [fear of failure](#). If your whole self-worth and identity is tied to your success, then mistakes and setbacks are seen as a threat. The common perfectionist answer to this problem? Avoid situations that have an element of risk. Better to have the perception of perfect than to risk it and have everyone see your imperfections.



HOW TO OVERCOME PERFECTIONISM

Understand The Cost of Perfectionism

Educating people about perfectionism and what the consequences of it are is a good starting point.

[One study found](#) that 'a brief low-cost intervention is effective at decreasing the psychological distress in maladaptive perfectionists'. The key here is to do so in a helpful and safe environment. Discussing hypothetical situations, can de-personalise it and ensure a non-judgemental atmosphere.

One way to do this is to ask students to give advice to a hypothetical student who worries about having to get perfect grades whilst being perfect in all other aspects of life (music/ sport/fashion/relationships) and then leave them time to

reflect on how they could follow their own advice themselves.

Remember Nobody is Perfect

A lot of students today suffer from FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). Sometimes students see others living 'the perfect life' and try to measure up. It can be a constant battle to remind them that no-one is as happy or as perfect as they may appear on Facebook. A great practical example for students is to show them how 'easy' it is to toss a coin and get 5 heads in a row, as demonstrated in [this video](#).

To see how it was actually done, [click here](#). This video helps students understand that what they see online is often fake and people sometimes project an image that is not real.

By helping students understand what is going on 'behind the curtain' with others, as well as developing malleable skills such as self-compassion, we can help students have a healthy relationship with their own flaws and understand that is part of what makes us all unique.

Strive For Excellence, Not Perfection

Perfection is a myth. It doesn't exist. It is an illusion. Instead of chasing this leprechaun, aim for high standards. As legendary American Football coach Vince Lombardi once noted that '*perfection is not attainable. But if we chase perfection, we can catch excellence*'.

[Research suggests](#) that proactively taking steps to educate students with perfectionist traits about the difference between having an ethic of excellence and chasing unobtainable perfectionism will '*enhance resilience and reduce levels of risk among perfectionism*'. These benefits include reducing anxiety, stress and improving mental wellbeing.

One of the best books we can recommend for those keen to harness this mindset is *An Ethic of Excellence: Building a Culture of Craftsmanship With Students*, by teacher Ron Berger. In it, he highlights many strategies, such as having his students work on long-term projects in order for them to develop a sense of pride in their work, a heavy emphasis on high quality regular feedback from teachers, as well as

encouraging students to draft and re-draft their work before submitting it.

Teachers can help make the difference between an ethic of excellence and perfectionism very clearly. The former is focused on becoming as good as you can be and developing your skills. The latter focuses on not making any mistakes and avoiding looking bad. In an ethic of excellence, mistakes are viewed as possible learning opportunities and not something to be covered up, embarrassed by or judged on.

Develop a Growth Mindset

A study on [gifted and talented students](#) found that unhealthy perfectionism is associated with a fixed mindset. The authors of this study note that this means that an intervention on helping students develop a growth mindset should help manage the negative consequences of perfectionism.

**Strive for excellence,
not perfection.**

Developing a growth mindset is helpful, as it shifts students towards improving their abilities and away from proving their abilities. The former is associated with learning and development, the latter with comparing yourself to others and a fear of failure.

This is something that lead researcher Carol Dweck has [spoken extensively about](#). This can be done by not focusing on natural ability, avoiding labels such as 'smart', 'gifted', and 'talented', and asking students [questions that reflect on their mindset](#). This helps students see themselves as a constant work in progress (and motivated to get better) instead of worrying about not being good enough (and demotivated by the thought of never being good enough).

Enjoy and Embrace The Challenge

On reflection, many people find achieving a goal a little underwhelming. The destination may not always be exactly what they thought it would be. What is often the exciting bit is the journey itself. Life is short and goes very quickly. It would be a shame if students only learnt to embrace the 1% of time

of achieving their goal and not also the 99% of the time it took to get there.

FINAL THOUGHT

For most, perfectionism can lead to an increase in stress and fear of failure. For some, it could be even worse. If you are unsure and think it may be a clinical level, it always best to seek help and advice from a professional.

The above tips are the sort of strategies that can help someone manage their perfectionism. They include understanding the cost of perfectionism, striving for excellence, remembering that no-one is perfect and enjoying the challenge. Talking about these issues matter. If we can start a dialogue with students, to ensure that they do not suffer in silence, we can really help them.

BLOG 6

DON'T BE A SLAVE TO YOUR PHONE



We live in an age of distraction. [A recent report](#) found that there are now more mobile phones on the planet than people. The ability to concentrate on a task is central to learning (as Daniel Willingham says: *'Memory is the residue of thought'*). So how can we encourage students to better manage their mobile phones while learning?

Research suggests that we check our phones on average [85 times a day](#). Think you don't use your phone that much? The same research found that people tend to use their phone twice as much as they think they do. Excessive use of mobile phones has been associated with a range of [negative consequences](#), such as poorer concentration, reduction in stress and disrupted sleep.

These consequences are bad at the best of times. During revision time they can be disastrous. Of course mobile phones can be used as a revision tool, as they offer access to google and a plethora of revision sites and revision apps). However, they can also be a source of [procrastination](#) and [FOMO \(Fear Of Missing Out\)](#).

Left to themselves, the temptation of misuse will probably far outweigh the benefits of effective use. It also interesting to note that teenagers evaluate risk and reward very differently

to adults. This is why they engage in 'risky', or what we might perceive to be 'self-handicapping', behaviours. For more about the teenage brain, you can read our previous blog, [Understanding The Teenage Brain](#).

One option is to turn the phone off or to give it to a parent to look after. There is certainly a case to be made that 'out of sight is out of mind', a sort of cold turkey approach. This is a strategy often employed to help improve self-control (see details of [the famous marshmallow experiment](#)). Removing the temptation reduces the likelihood of interacting with it.

However, recent research suggests that for students who use their mobile phone a lot, this absence may make them [more stressed and anxious](#). For these students, other strategies may have more of an impact. There is no one size fits all when it comes to helping students manage their mobile phones during revision.

We therefore suggest a range of simple options to help. For some, a combination of these strategies will yield the best results. The twelve strategies are...

- Set yourself a time limit
- Turn your phone off
- Limit the notifications you receive
- Put your phone away whilst revising
- Let your friends know when you will be back online



**You manage your
phone - your phone
doesn't manage you.**

- Turn down your phone's backlight near bedtime
- Use going on your phone as a reward for a certain amount of work
- Resist the urge to reply to every message you receive
- Give your phone to someone you trust to look after it while you study
- Turn your phone's airplane mode on
- Keep your phone out of your room while you sleep
- Turn your phone on silent when you need to focus

Need more hints and tips? Worried about how much you use your phone? Take a look at our guide to [mobile phone management](#).